

NCAA Most Outstanding Player Napier headlines all-tournament team



JOHN ZETMEIR
THE COLLEGIAN

Between 68 teams in the field, a number of players put in worthy performances to make the all-tournament team. Sadly, I could only pick five.

Shabazz Napier Connecticut senior guard

There is no secret that senior guard Shabazz Napier was the driving force behind the 2014 national championship campaign for the UConn Huskies. Napier bookended his college career with national championships on Monday night. The senior averaged just over 21 points, four rebounds and four assists during the tournament. He was named the Most Outstanding Player of the 2014 NCAA Tournament and will be remembered as one of the greatest players to ever put on a UConn jersey.

Aaron Harrison Kentucky freshman guard

Kentucky was loaded with talented freshmen this season. Many people thought that the pressure would get to the youthful Wildcats roster during the tournament. It may have in the championship game, but it didn't get to Aaron Harrison in big moments during the tournament. Harrison scored 19 points to help Kentucky knock off the top-seeded Wichita State Shockers. He then hit the go-ahead 3-pointer against both Michigan and Wisconsin in the Sweet 16 and the Elite Eight to ultimately give the Wildcats both wins.

Frank Kaminsky Wisconsin junior forward

Wisconsin reached their first Final Four under head coach Bo Ryan. A big reason for that was the play of Frank "The Tank" Kaminsky. The junior had a sluggish scoring game in his first game of the tournament against American University, and then in the Final Four against Kentucky, but in the three games that fell between those, he was unstoppable. Kaminsky averaged 22 points and approximately six rebounds in the round of 32, Sweet 16 and Elite Eight. His 28 point, 11 rebound performance was ultimately what propelled them past No. 1 Arizona to win the West Region.

Jordan McRae Tennessee senior guard

The Tennessee Volunteers had to play Iowa in a play-in game to ever get into the final field of 64 teams in the NCAA tournament. After defeating Iowa, Tennessee snagged two more wins before ultimately falling to the No. 2 Michigan Wolverines in the Sweet 16. McRae willed the Vols in scoring throughout the tournament. The senior averaged just under 20 points per game in the tournament. McRae was a big reason that the SEC had three teams in the Sweet 16, the most of any in the NCAA tournament.

Adreian Payne Michigan State senior forward

Adreian Payne started the tournament off with a bang as he scored 41 points against Delaware in the second round. Payne went on to score 41 points combined over the next three games, but his unique skill set was a big reason for the Spartans' run to the Elite Eight, where they fell to eventual national champion UConn.

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Kentucky freshman guard **Aaron Harrison** circumvents K-State freshman forward **Marcus Foster** and goes for a layup in the second half of the Kentucky Wildcats' victory over the K-State Wildcats in the NCAA Tournament second round in St. Louis on March 21.

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UConn VS
KENTUCKY
60-54



Big 12 conference underachievers in NCAA Tournament, not overrated



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Junior forward **Thomas Gipson** attempts to hit a jumper while being blocked by Kentucky forward **Julius Randle** and center **Dakari Johnson** in the first half of the K-State's second round NCAA Tournament loss to Kentucky March 21 at the Scottrade Center in St. Louis.



TATE STEINLAGE
THE COLLEGIAN

It was both a year to remember and forget for the Big 12 this season. Seven teams made it into March Madness after a competitive league season had many experts calling the conference the best in the country. However, the conference fell apart little by little in the tournament, leaving many to pose the question, "Was the Big 12 overrated?"

Overrated? No. Did it underachieve? Certainly. Many forget that four Big 12 teams had less-than-stellar matchups to open the tournament. K-State and Oklahoma had to deal with Kentucky and North Dakota State's length. Oklahoma State faced an equally talented backcourt of Gonzaga, while Texas went toe-to-toe with a streaky Arizona State squad.

The Longhorns were the only team to make it to the third round out of the group. Some may argue that matchups don't matter; if your conference is perceived to be that good, they should

win. While that's partially true, having your weaknesses exposed early on can create for a difficult situation — just ask Kansas.

The Jayhawks had to face a lengthy and physical Stanford squad without their biggest threat in freshman center Joel Embiid. The Cardinal forwards combined for 25 points against Kansas. While that's not a stunning statistic for just three players, the absence of Embiid caused havoc down low for the Jayhawks, leaving Stanford shooters open throughout most of the contest.

If there was any single favorable matchup, or at least a quality win for the conference, it was Baylor's 85-55 shellacking of Creighton. The Bears' guards were able to disrupt their men, which in return, helped keep Wooden Player of the Year award winner Doug McDermott in check.

But even that victory, and Baylor's run to the Sweet 16, can only be taken with a grain of salt. Weeks leading up to the tournament, experts stated that they weren't even sure if Baylor would make the field. The Bears started 2-8 in conference play before finding their footing and going 11-4 to finish out Big 12 conference and tournament action.

Iowa State, the only other Big 12 member to advance to the Sweet 16, had to rally their troops as well, as sophomore forward Georges Niang suf-

fered a broken foot in their NCAA Tournament opener. The Cyclones were able to go on and knock off North Carolina before falling to the eventual national champions, Connecticut, by five points. It was an admirable run for Iowa State, but one that merely highlighted the Big 12's struggles this postseason.

The conference did underachieve, there's no way around that. K-State shot 35.8 percent against Kentucky. Kansas freshman guard Conner Frankamp was the only reason the Jayhawks almost got past Stanford. Oklahoma allowed four North Dakota State players to score in double figures. The list goes on and on.

However, rather than the conference being overrated, the results paint an even clearer picture of college basketball in recent years. That portrait will show you that mid-majors are reaching high levels. True upsets are few and far between. Unfortunately, the Big 12 just happened to be the poster child for this in 2014.

Call it a disappointment (because it is), but don't forget what the conference achieved this past season. It was intense, it was controversial. It was a lot of things, but not overrated.

Tate Steinlage is a sophomore in mass communications. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.

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By The Numbers



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

A crowd of purple, blue and yellow-clad fans fill the Scottrade Center in St. Louis to watch Wichita State beat CalPoly in the Second Round of the NCAA Tournament on March 21. The NCAA set a Final Four attendance record for the second year in a row as a total of 158,682 people attended the Final Four over the three games between UConn, Kentucky, Wisconsin and Florida.

21

Number of games with a lower seeded victor

The NCAA Tournament is truly unpredictable. There are typically no perfect brackets anywhere in the country by the time it's all said and done. This season was no different, with upsets in every round of the tournament.

87.8

Percent of free throws made by UConn in the NCAA Tournament

In the NCAA tournament, almost every game is hotly contested. UConn made 101 of their 115 free throws, which was key in their victories. That 87.8 free throw percentage is a new tournament record for teams that played more than three games.

37

Percent of UConn's points scored by senior guard Shabazz Napier in the National Championship

Napier's performance in the tournament led his team to six victories. Without him, it's probable that the Huskies wouldn't have even made the tournament. He scored approximately 37 percent of their points in the National Championship, the highest since Glen Rice in 1989. Napier put himself among elite company, with 127 points, 27 assists, and 33 rebounds in the tournament. The only other players to do that are Kemba Walker, Larry Bird and Derrick Rose.

158,682

People that attended the Final Four

158,682 attended the Final Four in AT&T Stadium, which was the highest total ever. The NCAA has set an attendance record two years in a row now, both times in stadiums. While some don't like basketball being played in a stadium rather than arena, the records mean that this could be something the NCAA sticks with long term.

Huskies not mid-major caliber but still surprise with National Title

TATE STEINLAGE
THE COLLEGIAN

Monday's NCAA National Championship game was as unlikely as they come. It featured the highest combined seeding of any championship game in NCAA Tournament history. It had the absence of household college basketball names like Jabari Parker, Andrew Wiggins and Doug McDermott. It also capped off what many believe was the most thrilling and unpredictable tournament in recent memory.

In many regards, it felt like a Cinderella story of sorts, but only if you forgot the fact the two teams — programs in the top 30 for all-time wins — had won championships within the last three years. But even so, Connecticut's 60-54 victory over Kentucky was a storybook con-



clusion to an astonishing run.

It was a stretch that included wins over No. 1 Florida, No. 2 Villanova, No. 3 Iowa State and No. 4 Michigan State — all just to punch a ticket to the

title game.

No one outside of the state of Connecticut could have predicted such a finish. This was a team that fell to Houston and Southern Methodist in back-to-back games

in December before falling to the latter a second time in February. A group that escaped with wins against five teams that would not make the "Big Dance." A program that wasn't eligible to compete in the postseason last year due to academic futility.

None of that mattered once Connecticut took the court on March 20 in their NCAA Tournament opener against Saint Joseph's. Four Huskies scored in double figures that game, including senior point guard Shabazz Napier with 24 points.

Two days later, Napier one-upped his second round performance with 25 points to lead Connecticut past Villanova. But even that and the widespread upsets around college basketball weren't enough to convince America that the Huskies were for real.

Iowa State and Michigan State still stood in front of the Huskies. Junior forward DeAndre Daniels would help lead Connecticut past the Cyclones with 27 points, but it was all Napier against the Spartans. The 6-foot-1-inch, 180-pound guard scored 25 points to send the Huskies to the Final Four. It was just the second time in history that a seventh seed made it to the

National Semifinal.

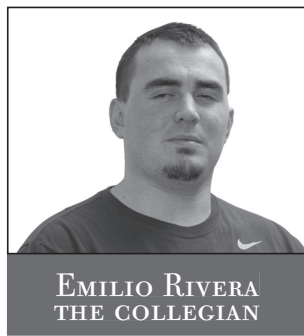
At that point, heads finally started to turn. Millions of brackets had been busted thanks to Connecticut. They'd get upset one final time, much to the disgust of Florida fans everywhere, when the Huskies put a bite mark into the Gator offense, holding Florida to a season-low of 53 points.

Connecticut's undefeated mark in National Championship games would remain perfect after Monday. For the final time in his career, Napier led the Huskies with 22 points, finishing the tournament with a total of 127 points (36 percent of Connecticut's scoring) and a much-deserved Most Outstanding Player award.

So no, the Huskies aren't a mid-major. They aren't quite a Cinderella team either. But when sports fans look back at this 2014 NCAA Tournament, they'll remember a run that will forever be cemented as one of the most surprising in NCAA history. The team may say they weren't surprised, but they'll take the glory any way it comes.

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Cardinals, Flyers defy odds after falling early in conference tournaments

EMILIO RIVERA
THE COLLEGIAN

In the wake of the 2014 NCAA Tournament, it's time to find out which teams overachieved. Out of the 68 teams who made it into the dance, two teams overachieved more than any other. Those teams were No. 10 Stanford and No. 11 Dayton.

Coming into the tourna-

ment as the No. 10 seed in the South region, Stanford exceeded everyone's expectations after tying for third place in the Pac-12. After losing by 25 points in their Pac-12 tournament against the eventual Pac-12 champions UCLA, many did not expect the Cardinals to make it past the first round against No. 7 New Mexico or make it to their first Sweet 16 since 2008.

Propelled by a 23-point explosion from their leading scorer, junior guard Chasson Randle, the Cardinals pulled their first upset over the Lobos. After gaining an early 16-point lead over the Lobos, the Cardinals saw their lead diminish halfway through the second half. Ahead 54-52 with

only 30 seconds to play, the Cardinals ended the game with four free throws to seal their first upset of the tournament.

In their second round game against Kansas, the Cardinals saw four of their starting five make it into double digits to hold the highly favored Jayhawks from storming back in a tight game, winning 60-57.

The No. 11 Dayton Flyers saw their first regional semifinal game in 30 seasons, as they overcame No. 6 Ohio State, No. 3 Syracuse and the No. 10 Cardinals to reach the Elite Eight for the first time since 1984.

After losing to Saint Joseph's in the quarterfinals of the Atlantic-10 tournament,

most people had the Flyers playing in the first round to earn their birth. However, because the first four games took place in their home arena, that idea was certainly crushed. The Flyers started the tournament facing huge odds, facing their in-state rivals Ohio State who they hadn't beat since the 1987 season.

After an unlikely hero, senior guard Vee Sanford, scored the go ahead layup with 3.8 seconds left in the game, the Flyers had already overachieved in the minds of most of the state of Ohio, beating Ohio State 60-59.

Then in the third round against the Orange, fresh off of their 24-point throttling of Western Michigan, the Flyers

outlasted a brutal burst to end the game from the Orange to win. The Flyers saw another opponents game winning shot bounce off of the rim in the fading seconds, winning 55-53 to advance the Sweet 16.

The first Sweet 16 matchup in the South regional featured two of the most unlikely teams, the Cardinals and the Flyers, in an odds defying 10 versus 11 seed matchup.

The Cardinals saw four of their starting five score in double digits, including Randle who led all scorers with 21 points. Unfortunately for the Cardinals, the Flyers themselves had four players in double digits, including having 34-points combined from the bench. The Flyers rode there

hot bench into the Elite Eight, 82-72.

This is where the Flyers luck faded, facing the powerhouse Florida in the Elite Eight, the No. 1 overall team in the tournament. The Flyers lost 62-52 against the talented Gators.

In the end, though, the Flyers shocked the world, winning three more games than most people gave them a chance to.

The Cardinals and the Flyers played the Cinderella roles, and thus, overachieved in their quests for championships.

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